

Introduction

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In March 2022, graduate students from the Departments of English and of Humanities came together in a Colloquium on “World Fictions of Friendship in Critical Times.” Co-organized by the English Department’s Graduate Diploma in World Literature and the Humanities Department’s Graduate Diploma in Comparative Literature, the day’s presentations analysed fictions written in some thirteen languages, from more than twelve countries, on four continents. The selections assembled in this special issue of *Pivot* give the reader a fascinating, provocative mix of perspectives on the *potentia* of fictional friendship relations: how they can work to disrupt political practices, modes of identification, and processes of subjugation; how they can allow various transfers through, and away from, trauma and war; how they can foster ethical engagements through new reading practices. But these essays also show the ways in which friendship relations can be weaponized, used to dominate and silence, or how they can fail to impede the forces of neo-liberal, globalized capitalism.

The day began with a keynote address by Dr. Doris Hambuch, Professor of Literature and Film Studies at the United Arab Emirates University in Al Ain, President of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association/Association Canadienne de Littérature Comparée, and leader of the CCLA/CLC research group on multi/trans-lingual Art. Her presentation entitled “‘It’s like no self. No I. Non-existence’: Friendship and Family in Contemporary Fiction” opened up pathways to friendships immersed in conflict, war, and exile. Her plurilingual, multimodal

analysis brought together contemporary Surinamese-Dutch, Chinese-British, and Dominican-American novels with a Lebanese-Swedish film to develop an eco-critical perspective on friendship as “timely extension of the discourse developed from Emerson to Derrida.” The panels that followed addressed in turn: “Theorizing Worldly Friendships” (with philosophy, translation, and resistance movements); “Friendship’s Transcultural Fault Lines: Racialization, Gender, Nationalism, and Imperialism” (with texts from India/Pakistan, Japan, Korea, and the Korean diaspora); “Intergenerational Friendships in Peace and in War” (with novels from Iran, Afghanistan, and Japan); and “Friendships Transgressing Binaries: Fantasy/Reality, Local/Global, East/West” (with Anglo-American speculative as well as Turkish magical realist fiction).

There was nothing simple about anything. Multiple definitions of friendship were proposed and debated: friendship allowing the harrowed hope of undefeated despair; friendship as unconditional insubordination; as temporary solidarity; as creative betrayal; as a way of living through crisis. Friendship relations were also conceived as alternative modes of engagement outside traditional communities of belonging, allowing access to subversive spaces where otherness can be overcome. Friendship relations as joyful, commensal, affective, meaning-making experiences.

What the texts cannot transmit is the vitality of our exchanges that day, the way participants could see new thoughts emerging from dialogic encounters: there were many, joyous, ah-ha! moments shared among us. We also witnessed prolonged conversations that promised to become working relations. The meeting was expertly organized and managed by Kristen Smith, a graduate student in English. Lively music by the Toronto marimba duo Taktus

welcomed participants at the beginning of the morning and afternoon sessions, and marked transitions. As one participant told us, “I knew this colloquium would be fun, but not *that* fun.”